



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement at the 14th OSCE Ministerial Council

As delivered by Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
R. Nicholas Burns
at the 14th OSCE Ministerial Council, Brussels
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Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

I want to begin by conveying to you President Bush's and Secretary Rice's deepest regards. Their support, and the support of my country is unwavering for the critical role the OSCE plays in achieving our common goal of a Europe whole, free, democratic and at peace. I want to thank the Belgian government, PM Verhofstadt and FM Karel de Gucht for their vigorous leadership.

The OSCE had its birth in one of the milestones of the Cold War: the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Helsinki Final Act enabled brave people like Vaclav Havel and Lech Walesa to turn to their governments and demand adherence to the human rights principles their governments subscribed to as signatories.

Helsinki's vision held that men and women could not be safe without freedom – an idea vital to America's Founding Fathers and the Enlightenment Philosophers who inspired them. From the start, our organization has been rooted in the best elements of our common heritage, and linked liberty and security with cooperation.

As the Berlin Wall fell and the Cold War ended, our organization went through unprecedented growth. During the 1990s, institutions such as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative for Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner for National Minorities were developed to help us meet our commitments. We opened OSCE Missions in many countries undergoing transitions to democracy to further support their success.

In that period, we also adopted the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe that led to effective transparency measures and valuable limitations on key categories of conventional military equipment, and allowed the exchange of an unprecedented amount of information regarding our military forces.

Our dreams of a region entirely at peace were shattered by the devastating Balkans wars and intercommunity violence in breakaway regions. Even then, we as States turned to the OSCE to help end the bloodshed, destroy weapons, and rebuild communities based on a model of tolerance and mutual respect for others.

This is the "OSCE way." This is our way: building confidence and security; preventing conflict; resolving disputes; breaking down the divisions of the past; fostering mutual respect; strengthening open and free societies through commitments to basic principles; and highlighting the limits on states' authority over their populace.

Today our organization faces new challenges that are fundamentally transnational in nature.

Terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction threaten us all. Transnational crime, trafficking in persons, climate change, narcotics smuggling, and energy security are all issues that require a strong multilateral response, with united action and creative solutions.

But new missions cannot become an excuse to dismantle that which we have so painstakingly built to date. The path to a better future is found in the principles enshrined in three decades of agreements subscribed to by all OSCE participating States.

Unfortunately, recent years have seen efforts to degrade these principles by some signatories. The very commitments that are the bedrock of our shared values are increasingly brought into question.

We regret that we have been unable to work successfully with Russia to achieve entry into force of the Adapted CFE Treaty. The CFE Treaty is a cornerstone of our cooperation. Ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty by my government and many others still awaits Russia's fulfillment of the remaining commitments that were made at Istanbul in 1999. Important progress has been made in Georgia and we hope more can be reached in the future. I respectfully ask our Russian colleagues to turn their attention to completing these commitments, including by resuming the withdrawal of their military forces from Moldova.

OSCE commitments to democracy are also under threat. There are too many examples of backsliding by some OSCE States. These include:

- administrative rules used to keep candidates off the ballot such as in Belarus;
- denial of access to public media by alternative voices, while state-controlled airwaves are at the disposal of ruling elites; also in Belarus;
- restrictions on freedom of assembly;
- the detention and even murder of human rights defenders;
- non-governmental organizations hampered by onerous registration requirements and outright harassment;
- journalists who are intimidated, physically attacked, or even killed; and
- criminal defamation proceedings which are used to silence unwanted voices and limit freedom of expression.

Some OSCE countries are also resorting to economic and financial pressure to impose their will on their neighbors.

Two members of our Organization, in particular, are under tremendous pressures. In Moldova and Georgia, protracted conflicts and external threats impede the full economic and democratic development of sovereign states, creating unsecured borders, undermining their territorial integrity and sovereignty, and hampering regional integration. As long as these

countries remain torn apart from within, and as long as open support for separatist regimes continues from without, these societies will find it harder to realize their potential. Our organization has been able to help them overcome some of these problems, and we should look today and tomorrow at new ways to provide even more help and to promote peaceful settlements to the conflicts involving these countries. The OSCE must always defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all members. We must give both Georgia and Moldova our full support. Peaceful, patient, persistent approaches are the only way ahead, and our governments must help, not hinder, the search for solutions.

Likewise, the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict prevents the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons. That conflict holds Armenia and Azerbaijan in a state of “no peace-no war,” with their borders closed and once-neighborly populations growing further estranged as years go by. Again, our organization can and should do more. Rather than reaffirming our commitments and rising to these new challenges, our Organization has been thrust into a protracted round of inward-looking reflection under the guise of “reform.”

We do not object to real efforts to improve the effectiveness of the OSCE; in fact, we welcome them. We will continue to pursue proposals that strengthen the Organization.

But let there be no mistake: for some participating States, the word “reform” is little more than a smokescreen for an outright attempt to dismantle the institutions we have built and nurtured together.

Perhaps no single institution better embodies our commitment than the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. ODIHR remains our indispensable tool for observing elections, human rights, and other core principles to which our organization aspires. It has earned our trust. It deserves our support. The U.S. will oppose all attempts to weaken ODIHR. It must be protected so that it will continue to be our most objective and aggressive proponent of free and fair elections. We support a budget increase for ODIHR to help it do its job.

The Representative for Freedom of the Media is an advocate for our ideals; given continuing efforts by some to restrict media freedom in our region, his message must not be ignored.

The field Missions remain jewels in the crown of our organization; they should be supported and strengthened.

And the institution of the Chairman-in-Office is critical to carrying forward our banner on a day-to-day basis. The leadership duties of the Chairman-in-Office require the strongest commitment to our organization’s values and to its work in emerging democracies. We are happy to consider any and all candidates for future tenure as Chairman-in-Office on the basis of these criteria, both within their own countries and in supporting our organization’s work throughout Europe and Eurasia. We support the Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office and hope that the incoming Spanish Chair will renew them, including the distinct anti-Semitism portfolio.

We should emerge from this Ministerial rededicated to enlisting the power of the OSCE to affect positive change. The United States has offered a number of ideas this year aimed at doing just that. For example:

- In Georgia, the OSCE should expand its activities in South Ossetia, and press authorities in that breakaway region to take demilitarizing steps matching those taken by Georgia. We should increase the number of OSCE monitors with access to the entire region, and seek joint Georgia/Russia/OSCE monitoring of the Roki Tunnel. We should call for economic rehabilitation projects, and the resumption of dialogue between the parties. I invite Russia to join these efforts, and to play a major role in the search for confidence and peaceful resolution of these frozen conflicts.
- On Nagorno-Karabakh, we thank Russia and France, our Minsk Group Co-Chairs. We have developed with the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia a reasoned approach which promises to lead to a negotiated settlement. Our organization should call on the leaders to turn these ideas into an agreement now.
- In Moldova, we call for an immediate resumption of talks on Transnistria. The OSCE should support Moldova's unilateral disarmament steps, and demand similar reductions from the Transnistrian side. We call for a resumption of Russian military withdrawal, and complete fulfillment of Russia's remaining Istanbul Commitments regarding both Moldova and Georgia. Here, too, Russia can play a major role, if it chooses, in the search for solutions.
- We have proposed strengthening the institutions of the Personal Representatives on Tolerance, expanding interaction with the press and non-governmental organizations, and elaborating new electoral commitments to include emerging voting technologies. We need to continue the fight against anti-Semitism and call for an OSCE conference on this issue in 2007.
- We and other participating States have pushed for OSCE involvement to fight the horrific crime of sexual exploitation of children. We look forward to a strong ministerial statement on this issue.
- Together with Russia, we have proposed that the OSCE embrace a concept for fighting terrorism through public-private partnership.
- Our Mission in Kosovo should be given a clear mandate to continue to support the transformation of Kosovo, and to contribute wherever possible in the implementation of the Final Status conclusions to be put forward by UNOSCE Martti Ahtisaari. We should do this without delay after the Serbian elections in January. Kosovo's Final Status should not be delayed after seven long years since NATO stopped ethnic cleansing there.
- We should agree to open up even more the work of the Permanent Council to non-governmental organizations.

The path to reform of the OSCE lies through action on the real challenges of our time, including:

- rededication to OSCE principles of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, peaceful negotiation, and the human rights of our citizens;

- respect for our common commitment to refrain from fomenting instability in neighboring States, and rejection of the idea that one State may maintain a military presence in another State against the will of the hosting State; this should not continue to occur in 21st century Europe;
- holding accountable any State that infringes on these principles.

The path to reform lies in renewal of our will to meet the challenges ahead. Through action. Through positive ideas for transformation of our societies and our international relations. This is the path we should choose.

This is our way, the OSCE way.

Thank you.